

## Message Text

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ORIGIN SS-15

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 CCO-00 NSCE-00 /016 R

66607

DRAFTED BY: S/S-O:MTANNER

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EXDIS

FOL REPEAT OF VIENTIANE 5728 TO SECSTATE SEPT 23

QTE:

S E C R E T VIENTIANE 5728

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LA, US

SUBJ: PROSPECTS FOR UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH LAOS

SUMMARY:

LE CONCLUDE THAT THE UNITED STATES CANNOT, IN THE LONG RUN, MAINTAIN RELATIONS WITH LAOS WITHOUT PAYING A GREAT PRICE ALTHOUGH IT MAY BE ABLE TO DO SO IN THE SHORT RUN. A COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT REMOTE FROM THE VIENTIANE SCENE IS RUNNING THE COUNTRY THROUGH PUPPET "PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNION." IT IS NOT INTERESTED IN OBSERVING NORMAL DIPLOMATIC PRACTICES OR IN SETTLING ISSUES PENDING WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES ON THE BASIS OF THEIR MERITS. IT ASSUMES WE ARE MAINTAINING A DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE HERE BECAUSE WE FIND IT USEFUL AND THAT WE SHOULD PAY FOR IT. IT IS CLOSELY ORIENTED TO THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AND UNLIKELY TO PURSUE AN  
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INDEPENDENT LINE. THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST A CONTINUED U.S. DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE HERE SOMEWHAT OUTWEIGH THOSE IN FAVOR OF SUCH A PRESENCE. WE ASSUME THE REGIME AS IT GETS FORMALLY INSTALLED WILL SHED THE

VESTIGES OF NEUTRALITY AND THAT ALTHOUGH WE MAY BE ABLE TO STAY IN BUSINESS FOR SOME TIME IF WE WALK SOFTLY WE WILL NOT LAST VERY LONG IF WE TAKE A HARD LINE ON OUR VESTIGAL PROBLEMS. UNLESS THE REGIME HAS UNDISCLOSED BROAD POLITICAL REASONS FOR TOLERATING OUR CONTINUED PRESENCE IT WILL MAKE IT MORE AND MORE DIFFICULT FOR US TO REMAIN ONCE IT DETERMINES NO U.S. ASSISTANCE IS FORTHCOMING. PRESSURES INVOLVING FOREIGN EXCHANGE, ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS IN GENERAL, LOCAL PERSONNEL AND PROTECTION AND WELFARE CASES WILL INCREASE. WE ARE PREPARED TO STAY IN BUSINESS AS LONG AS WE CAN BUT SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT THE "OLD LAOS" HAS GONE AND "NORMAL DIPLOMATIC PROCEDURES" HAVE GONE WITH IT. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTER SOME FORTY DAYS' OBSERVATION ON THE SCENE IT VIENTIANE, INCLUDING CONVERSATIONS WITH MOST MEMBERS OF THE PGNU AND MOST MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, AND RUMINATIONS ON PAST HISTORY AS WELL AS ALMOST DAILY CONSULTATION WITH THE COUNTRY TEAM, I WOULD SUM UP THE PROSPECTS FOR UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH LAOS AS FOLLOWS:

QUESTION: "CAN THE UNITED STATES MAINTAIN RELATIONS WITH THE PGNU WITHOUT PAYING A GREAT PRICE?"

ANSWER: "IN THE LONG RUN, NO; IN THE SHORT RUN, MAYBE."

("GREAT PRICE" IS A RELATIVE TERM. IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY REAL U.S. INTEREST IN LAOS AS SUCH AND IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY POSSIBILITY FOR THE EXERCISE OF U.S. INFLUENCE DIRECTLY IN LAOS AT PRESENT, ALMOST ANY PRICE, WHETHER RECKONED IN TIME, EFFORT OR MONEY, WOULD BE A GREAT ONE.)

I BASE THE FOREGOING CONCLUSIONS ON THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS.

2. THE NATURE OF THE PRESENT PGNU GOVERNMENT OF LAOS.

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THE BASIC FACT AFFECTING ALL HAPPENINGS HERE IS THAT THE COMMUNISTS HAVE WON A VICTORY AND ARE NOW IN CHARGE OF LAOS. HOWEVER, ALL OF THE DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVES IN VIENTIANE, WITH THE NOTABLE EXCEPTION, I THINK, OF THE DRV AMBASSADOR, WHO MUST HAVE HIS OWN CHANNELS, ARE ACCREDITED TO AND DEALING WITH AN ENTITY, OR, MORE ACCURATELY A NONENTITY, THAT IS NOT THE REAL GOVERNMENT OF LAOS. THEY ARE DEALING WITH A "CUT-OUT," STAFFED BY "GHOSTS OF THE PAST," "GOOD CIVIL SERVANTS," OPPORTUNISTS AND SOME MORE OR LESS TRUSTED COMMUNIST AGENTS OPERATING UNDER SPORADIC INSTRUCTIONS AS FAR AS THE DAY-TO-DAY BUSINESS OF FOREIGN RELATIONS

IS CONCERNED. THE REAL GOVERNMENT OF LAOS IS SOMEWHERE IN OR BEYOND SAM NEUA AND IS CONCENTRATING FOR THE MOMENT ON CONSOLIDATION OF ITS EFFECTIVE POWER WITHIN THE COUNTRY BY ELIMINATION OF VESTIGES OF THE OLD REGIME AND PERFECTION OF A NEW ADMINISTRATIVE APPARATUS. THERE IS MORE INVOLVED HERE THAN THE TRADITIONAL EQUIVOCAL SITUATION SO CONGENIAL TO ORIENTALS. THINGS WHICH THE COMMUNISTS CONSIDER IMPORTANT ARE BEING ATTENDED TO. OTHERS ARE BEING HELD IN SUSPENSE OR SIMPLY IGNORED. THE REAL GOVERNMENT OF LAOS IS NOT INTERESTED IN LEGALITY EXCEPT OF THE "SOCIALIST" SORT. ITS VIEW OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD IS A COMPOSITE OF COMMUNIST DOCTRINE AND THE "LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES" DOCTRINE THAT THE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES OWE LAOS "AID WITHOUT STRINGS." IT COULD NOT CARE LESS ABOUT "VIOLATION OF NORMAL DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE." IT HAS NO INTENTION OF SETTLING ISSUES PENDING WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES, INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES, "ON THE BASIS OF THEIR MERITS."

3. THE CURRENT LAO VIEW OF THE U.S. PRESENCE.

SO FAR AS I CAN TELL, THE CURRENT REGIME ASSUMES THAT WE ARE RETAINING A DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE HERE BECAUSE WE FIND SUCH A PRESENCE USEFUL TO US. THEY CONCLUDE, THEREFORE, THAT WE SHOULD PAY FOR IT IN SOME WAY. THE UNDP REPRESENTATIVE AND MOST OF THE COMMUNIST DIPLOMATS I HAVE TALKED TO SEEM TO HAVE MADE THE SAME ASSUMPTION.

4. THE NATURE OF THE REAL LAO LEADERSHIP.

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TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE, KAYSONE PHOMVIHAN, LAO REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL, NOUHAK PHOUMSAVANNV LRP CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBER, GEN. KHAMTAY SIPHANDONE, LAO PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, AND GEN. SAMAN BOUNGRAKET, CHIEF POLITICAL OFFICER OF THE LPLA, REPRESENT THE REAL LEADERSHIP OF THE COMMUNIST CORE OF THE LAO PATRIOTIC FRONT (LPF), AND THEY ALL REMAIN ALOOF FROM THE CURRENT VIENTIANE SCENE. ALTHOUGH WE CANNOT PRETEND TO KNOW THE PRECISE NATURE OF THEIR CURRENT WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAO DONG PARTY/ DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM GOVERNMENT, ALL WE DO KNOW ABOUT THEM MAKES IT SEEM HIGHLY UNLIKELY THEY WOULD BE INCLINED TO PURSUE, OR WOULD BE CAPABLE OF PURSUING, AN INDEPENDENT LINE VIS-A-VIS HANOI EVEN IF GEOGRAPHICAL AND LOGISTICS FACTORS COULD BE DISREGARDED. IN THIS CONNECTION, I HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF THE LPF RANK-AND-FILE IN VIENTIANE AND LUANG PRABANG ARE NORTHERN INDOCHINA MOUNTAINEERS RATHER THAN ETHNIC LAO, AND I SUSPECT THE PULL OF ANY LAO NATIONALISM ON THESE PEOPLE, AS DISTINCT FROM LOYALTY TO THE LPF/LAO DONG ENSEMBLE, WOULD BE INCONSIDERABLE.

5. THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST A CONTINUED U.S. DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN LAOS.

A. VIENTIANE IS THE ONLY U.S. DIPLOMATIC LISTENING POST LEFT IN INDOCHINA. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE UTILITY OF THE LISTENING POST WILL DIMINISH AS THE REGIME TIGHTENS CONTROLS.

B. A CONTINUED U.S. PRESENCE IN VIENTIANE WILL ENCOURAGE OUR THAI FRIENDS. BUT WILL IT ENCOURAGE THEM TO TAKE ACTIONS IN THEIR OWN DEFENSE SUFFICIENT TO COMPENSATE FOR THE INCREASED VULNERABILITY OF THE U.S. MISSION IN VIENTIANE?

C. THE RETENTION OF A DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN VIENTIANE CONTRIBUTES A MEASURE OF POTENTIAL FLEXIBILITY TO U.S. POLICY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. DOES THIS CONSTITUTE A REAL ADVANTAGE IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY GENUINE U.S. INTEREST IN LAOS, AS SUCH, AT THE PRESENT TIME?

D. RETENTION OF A DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN  
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VIENTIANE IS CONSISTENT WITH THE POLICY TOWARDS THIRD-WORLD COUNTRIES ENUMERATED IN THE SECRETARY'S UN SPEECH. DO LEGAL AND POLITICAL OBSTACLES TO U.S. ASSISTANCE TO LAOS MAKE THIS CONSIDERATION MEANINGFUL? IS LAOS STILL IN THE THIRD WORLD?

E. EXPLOITATION OF SINO-RUSSIAN RIVALRY IN LAOS MIGHT HAVE SOME UTILITY. DOES THE ACTUAL PREPONDERANCE OF DRV POWER IN LAOS PERMIT ANY SUGGESTION THAT SINO-RUSSIAN COMPETITION WILL BE EXERCISED INDEPENDENTLY OF NORTH VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE?

F. FOR HUMANITARIAN REASONS WE OUGHT BY OUR PRESENCE TO ENCOURAGE FRIENDLY LAO TO HANG ON. SHOULD NOT THE FALSE "JUDAS GOAT" ASPECT OF ANY SUCH ENCOURAGEMENT IN CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES GIVE US PAUSE?

G. A CONTINUED U.S. DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN VIENTIANE COULD PRESENT AN OPPORTUNITY FOR POTENTIAL CONTACTS WITH VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIANS. GRANTED, THOUGH THERE ARE NO CAMBODIANS HERE AT PRESENT, BUT ARE SUCH CONTACTS MORE VALUABLE HERE OR IN PLACES LIKE PARIS AND NEW YORK, FOR EXAMPLE?

H. A CONTINUED U.S. DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE MIGHT ENCOURAGE THE SURVIVAL OF SOME LAO NATIONAL IDENTITY. DO THE HISTORICAL PREPONDERANCE OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ORIENTATION OF THE LPF AND THE REALITIES OF LAO GEOGRAPHY REALLY PERMIT SUCH AN ASSUMPTION?

6. PROJECTION OF U.S./LAOS RELATIONS OVER THE NEXT SIX MONTHS.

A. WE ASSUME THAT BY APRIL 1976, IF NOT BEFORE, ANTICIPATED ELECTIONS WILL HAVE SERVED FORMALLY TO INAUGURATE THE NEW REGIME AND THAT THE VESTIGES OF

LAO NEUTRALITY WILL HAVE BEEN SHED. SOUVANNA PHOUMA, TH OTHER NON-COMMUNIST PERSONALITIES, THE ICC, THE FRENCH MILITARY MISSION AND VERY LIKELY THE FRENCH TEACHERS, WILL HAVE LEFT THE SCENE. THE KING, WHETHER PHYSICALLY PRESENT OR NOT, WILL HAVE BECOME TOTALLY IRRELEVANT. THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WILL STILL BE MAINTAINING LARGE MILITARY FORMATIONS HERE AND THEIR INFLUENCE WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN LAOS' FOREIGN AND INTERNAL AFFAIRS. THE CHINESE AND SOVIETS WILL BE ENGAGED IN SUBSTANTIAL SECRET

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ASSISTANCE AND OTHER ACTIVITIES. THE UNDP WILL HAVE FOUND PROJECTS TO SPEND MONEY ON. THE COMMUNIST EMBASSIES OTHER THAN THE CHINESE AND RUSSIANS WILL HAVE PROVIDED TOKEN ASSISTANCE OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER. THE EUROPEAN AND ASIAN NON-COMMUNISTS WILL BE DOING SOMETHING IN THE NATURE OF WHAT THEY ARE DOING NOW, ALTHOUGH ORDERS OF MAGNITUDE MAY CHANGE IN RELATION TO NAM NGUM II AND FEOF DEVELOPMENTS.

B. WE DO NOT EXPECT THAT EITHER DIPLOMATIC OR LEGAL PROBLEMS WILL HAVE EVOLVED TO ANY DEGREE THAT WOULD RAISE THE POSSIBILITY OF CONSIDERING UMVS. ASSISTANCE TO LAOS IN ANY FORM. IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT THAT SUCH EVOLUTION DID OCCUR, PAST U.S. ARRANGEMENTS FOR HANDLING SUCH AFFAIRS WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE TO THE LAO AND, IF WE HAVE LEARNED ANYTHING FROM EXPERIENCE, SHOULD BE DOUBLY UNACCEPTABLE TO US. IN ANY EVENT, COMMON SENSE WOULD SEEM TO DICTATE THAT THE COMMUNIST POWERS, HAVING "LON" LAOS, SHOULD ENJOY THE PRIVILEGE OF SUPPORTING IT ECONOMICALLY.

C. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT U.S.-THAI RELATIONS, AT LEAST IN THE VIENTIANE ARENA, ARE GOING TO DEVELOP ALONG ONE OF TWO GENERAL LINES. WE MIGHT FIND OURSELVES PROBING, IN A GINGERLY FASHION, THE POSSIBILITY FOR THE REDUCTION OF SOME OF OUR NUMEROUS PENDING PROBLEMS CONCERNING THE WRECKAGE OF THE FORMER AMERICAN PRESENCE IN LAOS, COMPOUNDS, PUBLIC AND GENERAL PROPERTY, ET CETRA, BEING PREPARED, LIKE A PAINLESS DENTIST, TO BACK OFF AND WAIT A BIT EVERY TIME WE STRIKE A NERVE. THE LEISURELY APPROACH WOULD MAINTAIN A LEVEL OF ACTIVITY BETWEEN EMBASSY AND FOREIGN MINISTRY. IT WOULD PERMIT US TO SPIN THINGS OUT FOR A WHILE, CONDUCTING A HOLDING OPERATION AND PRESERVING A "WINDOW" HERE, THROUGH WHICH TO LOOK AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. WE MIGHT ON THE OTHER HAND FIND OURSELVES PROCEEDING IN A MORE HARD-NOSED FASHION, MAKING POINTS ABOUT "NORMAL DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE" AND "NOT WIPING THE SLATE CLEAN" OF PAST

OUTRAGES BY THE PGNU. THIS WOULD DO OUR HEARTS GOOD  
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BUT IT REALLY THINK WE'D LAST LONGER, IF THAT'S THE  
OBJECT OF THE EXERCISE, BY FOLLOWING THE FIRST APPROACH.

D. UNLESS THE PGNU HAS SOME BROADER UNDIS-  
CLOSED POLITICAL MOTIVE FOR TOLERATING OUR CONTINUED  
DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE HERE, I AM CONVINCED THEY ARE  
EXPECTING OR AT LEAST HOPING THAT SOONER OR LATER THE  
UNITED STATES WILL LOOSEN THE PURSE STRINGS IN RESPONSE  
TO THE TRADITIONAL NEEDS OF POOR LITTLE LAOS. IN THIS  
CONNECTION, THEY HAVE BEEN REMARKABLY SLOW ON THE UP-  
TAKE AS WITNESS THEIR LATE REALIZATION THAT OUR CON-  
TINUED PARTICIPATION IN THE NAM NGUM II PROJECT WAS NOT  
AUTOMATIC, OR THE CLARIFICATION SOUGHT BY THEIR CHARGE  
IN WASHINGTON IN SEPTEMBER OF THE AID PROHIBITION IN  
THE CONTINUING RESOLUTION PASSED MORE THAN TWO MONTHS  
EARLIER. AT THE SAME TIME, THEIR ANGER AND DISILLUSION-  
MENT OVER OUR DECISION ON NAM NGUM HAS NOT SO FAR BEEN  
TRANSLATED INTO A DEMAND FOR OUR DEPARTURE -- WHICH  
COULD CONCEIVABLY COME ABOUT NEVERTHELESS IN CONNECTION  
WITH THEIR OCTOBER 11; FESTIVITIES OR AT ANY TIME THEREA-  
AFTER. AS IT BECOMES EVIDENT THAT AMERICAN LARGESSE  
WILL NOT BE FORTHCOMING, THE NASTIER, CRUNCHIER ASPECTS  
OF THE LOCAL SITUATION WILL BECOME MAGNIFIED.

E. FOR EXAMPLE, ENFORCEMENT OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE  
REGULATIONS, LONG ON THE BOOKS BUT NORMALLY IGNORED,  
REPRESENTS ONE OF THE MOST READILY AVAILABLE MEANS  
OF PUTTING THE SCREWS ON FOREIGNERS OR AT LEAST ON  
THOSE FOREIGNERS SELECTED FOR SUCH TREATMENT. THIS  
PROCESS HAS BEGUN WITH THE PRESSURE ON THE BANQUE  
D'INDOCHINE (BIC) AND OTHER PRIVATE BANKS AND ON THE  
EMBASSY'S ACCOUNT IN THE LAO NATIONAL BANK. WE SHOULD  
BE PREPARED TO OPERATE IN ALL RESPECTS ON AN ARTIFICI-  
ALLY IMPOSED AND SELECTIVELY ENFORCE EXCHANGE RATE  
WHICH WILL LIKELY DOUBLE OR TRIPLE THE DOLLAR COST  
OF OUR OPERATIONS. PRESSURE ON LOCAL EMPLOYEES,  
ROUTINE IN THESE SITUATIONS, ALREADY EXISTS AND WILL  
BE INTENSIFIED. CARRYING OUT OUR CONSULAR FUNCTION  
HAS ALSO BECOME MORE DIFFICULT, AND THE PGNU CON-  
SISTENTLY IGNORES ITS OBLIGATIONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL  
CONSULAR LAW. WE HAVE GREAT DIFFICULTY IN GETTING ACCESS TO  
ARRESTED AMERICAN CITIZENS AND CAN OFFER THEM ABSOLUTELY NO  
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PROTECTION AGAINST THE CAPRICES OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES. HOUSE-  
KEEPING DETAILS, INCLUDING THE IMPORTATION OF BASIC  
NECESSITIES SUCH AS COOKING GAS AND EVENTUALLY OTHER  
PETROLEUM PRODUCTS, WILL BECOME EVEN MORE COMPLICATED.

THE NON-EXISTENCE OF MEDICAL CARE AND SERVICES WILL  
POSE PROBLEMS. IN SHORT, Q ANTICIPATE THE NORMAL,  
IF THAT'S THE WORD, "CURTAIN" EXISTENCE MODERATED ONLY  
BY "THEIR" INEFFICIENCY AND "OUR" INGENUITY.

7. COMMENT: OBVIOUSLY THE WHOLE QUESTION OF U.S. -  
LAOS RELATIONS IS BIGGER THAN LAOS, AND WE WILL OPERATE  
HERE IN WHATEVER MANNER IS REQUIRED BY CONSIDERATIONS  
OF THE "BIG PICTURE." HOWEVER, WE SHOULD BE PREPARED  
TO OPERATE ON THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE "OLD LAOS" HAS  
GONE AND "NORMAL  
DIPLOMATIC PROCEDURES" HAVE GONE WITH  
IT.

8. ACTION REQUESTED: DEPARTMENT DISTRIBUTE TO  
USIA, DEFENSE, CIA AND APPROPRIATE FOREIGN SERVICE  
POSTS.  
CORCORAN UNQTE INGERSOLL

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** Z  
**Capture Date:** 26 AUG 1999  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** TOSEC, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION, COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 23 SEP 1975  
**Decaption Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Decaption Note:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** ellisoob  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1975STATE226389  
**Document Source:** ADS  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** S/S-O:MTANNER  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** 11652 GDS  
**Errors:** n/a  
**Film Number:** D750329-0906  
**From:** STATE  
**Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Image Path:**  
**ISecure:** 1  
**Legacy Key:** link1975/newtext/t197509105/baaaacil.tel  
**Line Count:** 345  
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM  
**Office:** ORIGIN SS  
**Original Classification:** SECRET  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** EXDIS  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 7  
**Previous Channel Indicators:**  
**Previous Classification:** SECRET  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** EXDIS  
**Reference:** n/a  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** ellisoob  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 28 MAY 2003  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <28 MAY 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <24 NOV 2003 by ellisoob>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
06 JUL 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** n/a  
**TAGS:** PFOR, LA, US  
**To:** SECRETARY  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006